DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 136 159 CG 011 200

AUTHOR Levinson, Judith H.
TITLE Peer Academic Advisement: The Use of Students as Peer Paraprofessional Support Staff.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Association of Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors (60th, New Orleans, Louisiana, March 18-21, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; *Counselor Training; *Educational Resources; *Helping Relationship; Human Services; *Individual Counseling; *Paraprofessional Personnel; *Peer Counseling; Program Descriptions

ABSTRACT

The use of peer paraprofessionals in an academic advisement setting provides an attractive method of extending student services. Students selected to be advisors develop expertise in interpersonal communication skills and, through their increased understanding of college and their peers, are able to more fully experience their own educations. Furthermore, peer advisors are able to provide valuable feedback to the staff about campus facilities, academic offerings, the impact of policy upon students and the effectiveness of the staff itself. Professional training and supervision are critical to the success of peer advisement programs. Student development staff and academic teaching faculty may, depending upon the specific functions of the peer advisors, jointly teach, administer and monitor the program. Students from particular academic disciplines, special interest groups or ethnicities can be selected as peer advisors thereby expanding general student services. Administrative structure should be determined by individual institutions and supervision. Clearly, peer paraprofessional staff can provide a new and exciting dimension to student services but they do require the assistance and support of professional staff in order to be effective. (Author)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED136159

EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Peer Academic Advisement: The Use of Students as Peer Paraprofessional Support Staff

by Judith Hoy Levinson

Rationale There are several reasons why using students as paraprofessional staff deserves consideration. In New York City, for example, budgetary crises resulted in reductions in student services and increases in teaching faculty responsibilities - a bad situation for students who are faced with minimal or no course requirements and who are not, in many cases, assigned a faculty advisor until after they have chosen a major. Additionally, both large and small colleges share the problem of students who, for a variety of reasons, do not utilize the professional services available. And, on most campuses, even if all students did choose to seek out help, the already burdened student service departments would not be able to meet such a demand in the traditional one-to-one counseling or advising method. In short, the financial problems of educational institutions, student misconceptions about counseling and advising services, and "too few counselors to go around," require that innovative methods of providing help to students be devised.

CG011200

The widespread use of the peer paraprofessional helper began in the anti-poverty programs of the sixties with the use of the indigenous street worker. Education, too, has historically used the peer paraprofessional as residence hall advisor, orientation worker and big brother or sister. The effectiveness of these helpers in settings ranging from academic tutoring to personal counseling is well documented (Brown 1972, Delworth, Sherwood and Casaburri 1974).

Importantly, what is institutionalized in peer counseling and advising programs goes on regardless of the administration's view of the abilities of students to contribute to each other's growth. Cafeteria and dormitory conversations include discussions of the value of astronomy or philosophy or accounting. Questions such as "Is it a good course for me to study?" and "Is it easy or difficult?" are often asked in terms of "How did you <u>like</u> that course?" Peers influence each other in decision-making. However, by lacking information about course offerings and administrative procedures, and by not realizing that "good," "easy," and "liking," are relative terms, friends may mislead

each other.

Thus, through the use of peer paraprofessionals, student service departments can, in a variety of ways, broaden their services. Teaching peer paraprofessionals to help other students increases the availability of reliable information about the college. Furthermore, such programs will provide many students with valuable interpersonal skills which will enhance their immediate educational experience as well as enrich their future vocational and personal lives.

Training Model The training design focuses on a problem-solving approach and is appropriate for either personal or academic advising. Problems such as "I am failing in school," or "I am always fighting with my family," or "I am worried because I haven't chosen a major and don't know my interests or abilities," cause the client to seek help. The process of helping the client involves: 1) clarifying and identifying the problem, 2) gathering relevant information about the problem

area, 3) discovering alternatives, 4) assessing the alternatives, 5) selecting and acting upon an alternative, 6) providing support for the client as he or she moves into action. Hence, peer advisors must be able to understand the concept of self as it relates to both the client's and their own values, examine past and current frame of reference and utilize the decision-making process.

Both lecture-discussion classes and experiential exercises can be used to teach interpersonal skills and information relevant to the specific job duties. Peer advisors in jobs such as advisement or career planning will need information related to their responsibilities. For example, general academic advisors will need to be familiar with college requirements, course offerings, what is required for a given major, administrative policies regarding grading, procedures for withdrawing from a course, faculty office hours, and campus facilities for health, professional counseling and student activities. Advisors in academic departments will require more specific information about the

major, faculty, and graduate study in the field.

All peer advisors need to learn interviewing techniques such as accurate paraphrasing and how to ask open-ended questions. The training may include values clarification exercises, decision-making experiences and role-playing with feedback from class members, instructors and analysis of video or audio recordings of the role-plays. Additionally, peer advisors must understand the importance of confidentiality and accountability.

Training in interpersonal skills is most effective when done in small groups of ten or twelve while information can be given in lecture fashion in larger groups. Within the small group classes the use of behavioral objectives in teaching both interpersonal skills and college information will enable the trainee and instructor to evaluate the potential advisor's progress. One professional staff member as instructor and an experienced peer advisor as assistant can provide both theoretical material and, from their experience on the job, real examples of how the

skills and theory are integrated.

Generally, training in interpersonal skills can be accomplished in forty-five to fifty hours. Additional time will be needed to provide informational training. Peer advisors may also serve and "internship," receiving feedback from an experienced advisor, staff and classmates as to their effectiveness.

Selection of Advisors Both professional and student evaluations of the prospective advisor are important. Examining past experiences, as one would evaluate previous employment, will provide some information as to the student's ability to do the work of a peer advisor. As not all students will have related experience, open-ended questions and role-plays in which the prospective advisor assumes the role of advisor will help the interviewers to evaluate the student's current level of interpersonal functioning, the knowledge he or she has about the college, and the potential which may be realized through training.

Students who express great confidence in their abilities to manipulate the system or who indicate strong personal values may be initially attractive because of their assertiveness. However, the ability to "listen with the third ear," and the ability to communicate effectively are highly important skills which may be easily overlooked if vague criteria such as "friendliness," "wants to help others," or "nice personality," are used. Standardized measures of interpersonal skills are most helpful (see Carkhuff, R.R. Helping and Human Relations. Vols. 1 and 2. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969).

Supervision Among the critical factors in the success of peer advisement programs is the involement and support of the professional staff. Regular meetings with the professional to discuss cases and problems, to review interpersonal skills and to update information will enhance the effectiveness of the peer advisors. Speakers from such offices as the registrar, admissions, financial aid, career planning and student activities

can explain current policies, procedures and services. This information will provide the peer advisors with an understanding of college structure as well as providing them with referral sources for use with clients.

After peer advisors begin to work, weekly practicum meetings, perhaps including evaluation of taped advisement sessions, are helpful. The peer advisors need to interact with each other as well as with the professional. Their exchange of information and ideas, and the support they can provide each other, further develops their "professionalism."

Administrative Structure The structure of peer advisement programs will vary from college to college. Peer advisors may work at orientation, registration, or in departmental offices. At Queens College, for example, peer advisors help new students with course selection, and through the confusing registration process. Additionally, a corps of advisors work each day in the Office of Academic Advisement where they handle general advisement

problems. Included in their responsibilities is interviewing freshmen who are considering program changes. Peer advisors inform the freshmen of the procedures and advise them of the ramifications of their actions.

Still other peer advisors work in academic departments. They answer prospective majors' questions about major requirements, course requirements, course offerings, and so forth. Some departments provide peer advisors with extensive information about the specifics of each course, the educational backgrounds and research interests of the faculty, the occupations most related to the major, and graduate school information. In one department, peer advisors decide, based on criteria jointly determined by faculty and peer advisors, which students may be permitted to register for already filled classes. These advisors are supervised by both academic faculty and professionals from the Office of Academic Advisement.

A third group of peer advisors staff the Campus Resource Center. Located in a heavily trafficked area, the Center has

become "the place to find out where, who and, sometimes, why." In this setting advisors primarily provide general information about the campus and, because of the lack of privacy, refer students who wish to discuss problems to the Advisement Office.

On some campuses the professional staff may not reflect the diverse special interest and ethnic groups represented by the student population. In such cases, peer advisors can be selected from these groups, thereby broadening and personalizing the services offerred. Peer advisors, while extending services, also can provide invaluable feedback to the college staff about the effects of policies, procedures, and services on the student.

Importantly, all advisors know campus resources and have learned in training how to make an appropriate referral. Peer advisors are well aware of the limits of their jobs and of their skills. They have learned what information they need from the client in order to refer him or her to the right campus facility or person. The goals of unwinding red tape, saving unnecessary steps and giving the <u>right</u> information, are appreciated by peer

advisors. Most of them have experienced the disasters of misinformation and the confusion of being sent from one office to another. They find it rewarding to help others avoid these frustrations.

Conclusion The use of peer paraprofessionals in an academic advisement setting provides an attractive method of extending student development services. Students selected to be advisors develop expertise in interpersonal communication and, through their increased understanding of the college, are able to more fully experience their own educations. Furthermore, peer advisors can provide valuable feedback to the staff about campus facilities, academic offerings, and the effectiveness of the staff itself.

Professional training and supervision are critical to the success of peer advisement programs. Student development staff and academic teaching faculty may, depending upon the specific functions of the peer advisors, jointly teach, administer and monitor the program. Students from particular academic disci-

plines, special interest groups or ethnicities can be selected as peer advisors thereby expanding general student services.

Administrative structure should be determined by individual institutions based upon need and, importantly, upon availability of professional staff for teaching and supervision. Clearly, peer paraprofessional staff can provide a new and exciting dimension to student services but they do require the assistance and support of the professional staff in order to be effective.

References

Brown, W.F. Student-to-Student Counseling: An Approach To Motivating Academic Achievement. Austin, Tex.: University of Texas, Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, 1972.

Delworth, U., Sherwood, G., and Casaburri, N. Student Paraprofessionals: A Working Model for Higher Education. Student Personnel Series No. 17. Washington, D.C.: American Personnel and Guidance Association, 1974.